

Does Morphine suppress breathing?

An overdose of morphine may suppress breathing, but in most cases if the morphine has been properly prescribed this will not occur. Your doctor and nurse will continually monitor your illness as well as the side effects of any medication that you are taking.

Is Morphine an effective pain killer?

Morphine can be a very effective and efficient medication for relieving your pain, as long as it is used correctly. You need to take your medication on time and in the prescribed doses. It is far easier to relieve pain earlier rather than later. When pain gets to a crisis point, it is much harder to manage effectively.

Some people worry about the pain relievers becoming less effective. Tell your doctor if the medication is not working effectively so that they can:

- Increase the dose of the medication;
- Prescribe a different drug;
- Give the medication via a different route (injection or patch rather than tablet), or
- Prescribe a combination of medicines.

What about breakthrough pain?

There may be times, even if you receive regular or continuous analgesia, when you will experience pain. This is called 'breakthrough pain' and it can be very distressing for both you and your carer. Your doctor may prescribe extra medication that can be taken as required for breakthrough pain. Take the extra medication, record the time and dose of the medication, and remember to tell the nurse or doctor that you require extra medication for breakthrough pain.

Medication can improve your quality of life

Some people worry that using opioid medicines will limit their lifestyle. Remember however that it is the pain, not the medicines, that limit your enjoyment of life. Without pain, you will probably feel better, have more energy, have a better appetite, and be more independent.

This fact sheet was produced by Palliative Care Queensland, the peak organisation for Palliative Care in Queensland, representing the interests and aspirations of all who share the ideal of quality care at the end of life for all. To order additional copies of this fact sheet, or to become a member of Palliative Care Queensland, please contact:

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PCIS is a free telephone information and support service available to all Queenslanders affected by terminal illnesses, including patients, family members, carers and health professionals. PCIS provides emotional support, counselling and general information about Palliative Care and end-of-life services in Queensland. Support is provided by trained professionals who have access to a large database of up-to-date information.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this brochure is for general guidance only and is not clinical advice. All efforts have been taken to ensure that the information provided is accurate and up to date at the time of printing. The information provided is intended to help inform patients and their family. Your healthcare decisions are best made in consultation with your doctor

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**Palliative
Care
Queensland**

About Pain and Pain Management

Information for Patients and Carers

What is pain?

Pain is an unpleasant sensation, often causing suffering or distress. All pain hurts and wears you down. Pain can also make you irritable, make it hard to sleep, reduce your appetite, and make it hard to be active and enjoy life.

Facts about pain

- Not everyone with a terminal illness will experience pain;
- Everyone experiences pain differently, so the way you experience pain will be unique to you;
- Most pain can be relieved;
- Pain is not always constant but can vary over the day and with different activities, and
- Pain may vary with your moods, emotions and family life.

How can I help control my pain?

Good pain control requires good communication amongst patients, carers, medical staff and nurses. In most cases, working through the following 3 steps in the pain management cycle will relieve your pain. Managing your pain is a team effort but you are the most important person in the team.

The 3 steps are:

1. Sharing information
2. Choosing the right medicines
3. Using medicines properly

Step One

Sharing Information

It is important to openly and honestly share information with your doctor and care team so they know exactly what is happening. Don't be tempted to just 'get by' or 'tough it out'. This will only reduce your ability to enjoy life now, and may make it harder to relieve your pain in the future. Involve your carer and family as they often notice things you have not.

Tell your doctor about ALL the medicines you take – include herbal, natural and over the counter medicines. Ask as many questions as you need of your doctor. Write your questions down and make sure you get the answers you need.

Step two

Choosing the right medicine

Medication is the core treatment of pain in terminal illness. Your doctor is experienced in choosing the best pain relievers. They can also obtain expert advice from a palliative care specialist if they have difficulty managing your pain.

There are two main groups of pain medicines

- Mild pain relievers, such as aspirin and paracetamol
- Medium to strong pain relievers, such as opioids – morphine, oxycodone, fentanyl

Opioid medicines differ in a number of ways e.g. length of time before they start working, length of time they last, how they are taken and possible side effects. Drugs can be given by mouth (tablet, capsule, liquid), by injections (into skin, muscle, or vein), by skin (patch). Surgery, radiotherapy and nerve blocks (like a local anaesthetic) are used to control pain in some cases.

Complementary measures include

- hot packs, cold packs
- careful positioning and repositioning
- appropriate exercise or support for a painful body part
- special physiotherapy techniques such as laser therapy and ultrasound
- therapies such as massage, relaxation, meditation, hypnosis, music therapy
- aromatherapy, acupuncture and acupressure
- distraction – any activity that diverts your thoughts and holds your attention will lessen your awareness of pain.

Step 3

Using medicines the right way

- Take your medicines as prescribed at the right times;
- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about your medicines if you have any problems;
- Make sure you have enough supply;
- Store medicines in a safe, dry place out of the reach of children and others;
- Measure your doses accurately;
- Set up reminders to take your medication;

- Record the time and amount of medication you have taken;
- Ask whether it is safe to drive or use machinery while you are taking medication;
- Do not intentionally miss or change your medicine without medical advice, and
- Dispose of medicines correctly by returning them to the pharmacist.

If I take opiates, will I become addicted?

There are many myths about opioid medicines, however here are the facts:

- Morphine and other opioid medicines are for improving life – not hastening death;
- Taking opioids does not mean you are closer to dying;
- It is far more important to focus on the quality of life that these medications can provide;
- Addiction only occurs when people have no pain and abuse opioid medications, and
- Although some people worry about the side effects of medicines, not everyone experiences side-effects and most side-effects are temporary and manageable.

What are the side-effects of opiates?

- Constipation relieved with laxatives;
- Nausea & vomiting – often temporary and alleviated with medicine;
- Drowsiness or confusion – may occur for a short time after starting or increased doses, and
- Dry mouth – may improve with time.

Tell your doctors about any side effects as the dose or type of medicine may need to be altered.